



SDMS Doc ID 2014610



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METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Executive Office

January 9, 2003

Mr. Wayne Nastri
Region IX Administrator
United States Environmental Protection Agency
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

Dear Administrator Nastri:

Perchlorate Contamination of the Colorado River

On behalf of the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California and the nearly 17 million drinking water consumers in our service area, I want to thank you for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's attention and response to perchlorate contamination in the Colorado River. As you know, the discovery of this pollutant in our primary surface water supply poses serious resource and public health issues for our customers. As California proceeds toward regulation of perchlorate in drinking water, Metropolitan and other drinking water providers must move quickly to provide the most comprehensive protection possible for this vital source of supply.

Current clean-up efforts in Henderson, Nevada to cut off the contamination source addresses one major pathway of perchlorate entering into Lake Mead. We recognize the efforts of both USEPA, the Nevada Department of Environment Protection, and Kerr-McGee given the engineering and administrative complexity of this operation. However, data suggest to us that the mass of perchlorate entering into the Colorado River through Lake Mead is still unacceptable to downstream users.

The State of California Office of Health Hazard Assessment proposed a draft public health goal range of 2 – 6 parts per billion. This range sets the stage for an enforceable standard that will likely trigger massive clean-up projects with costs estimated in the billions of dollars. The unprecedented media attention surrounding this issue generates significant public concern over the safety of public water supplies. In light of these costs and the potential human health effects of perchlorate, we request that the USEPA immediately initiate the following actions:

- Install additional extraction wells and proven perchlorate remediation technologies (such as ion exchange or biological treatment) along the Las Vegas Wash to remove perchlorate from the wash gravels area.
- Increase the feasibility of certain remediation activities at Henderson, Nevada by ensuring there is no loss of "return flow credits." Ensuring that these credits are not lost would increase the feasibility of some remediation projects that otherwise would not be undertaken (e.g., evaporation ponds).

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- Earmark federal funding for perchlorate remediation of contaminated sites that affect the quality of southern California's groundwater supplies.

An accelerated clean-up effort at the Las Vegas Wash area will result in the most meaningful risk reduction to drinking water users of Colorado River water. With a drinking water standard mandated in California by December 31, 2003, the drinking water community is under tremendous pressure in the face of what is certainly to be more stringent enforcement of this contaminant. We feel strongly that the extra remediation cost is justified given the current knowledge of potential health effects of perchlorate.

Downstream water users in Nevada, Arizona, California and Mexico need your leadership to accelerate and expand the clean-up of perchlorate in the Colorado River in order to help restore public confidence in our drinking and agricultural water supplies. I would appreciate an opportunity to meet with you to discuss this urgent matter as soon as possible.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ronald R. Castelum', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ronald R. Castelum
Chief Executive Officer